

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF CRIME REPORTING IN UGANDAN BROADCAST AND ONLINE MEDIA

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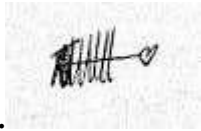


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I, Valereen Mwachulhwa, declare that this is my original work, it is not plagiarised and has not been submitted to any other institution for any award.

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APPROVAL

The student Valereen Mwahulhwa's dissertation report is original and has not been published or presented to any other institution for any award.

I hereby give my approval that this dissertation be submitted to the School of Journalism, Media and Communication, Uganda Christian University (UCU)



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Date...2/06/2026

SUPERVISOR

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my beloved mother, whose unwavering love, sacrifices, and support made my education possible. Her determination to see me through school, even in the face of challenges, inspired me to persevere and complete this study. I am deeply grateful for her belief in me and laying the foundation for my academic journey.

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Table of Contents

DECLARATION	ii
APPROVAL	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction:	1
1.2 Background to the Study:	1
1.2.1 Historical Perspective:	1
1.2.2 Conceptual Perspective:	2
1.2.3 Theoretical Perspective:.....	2
1.2.4 Contextual Perspective:.....	3
1.3 Statement of the Problem:.....	3
1.4 Purpose of the Study	4
Part 1: Objectives/Purpose General Objective	4
Some Particular Goals:	4
1.5 Research Questions:.....	4
1.6 Scope of the Study:	4
1.7 Significance of the Study:	5
1.8 Conceptual Framework:	5
1.9 Definition of Key Terms:.....	5
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	6
2.1 Introduction:	6
2.2 Broadcast vs. Online Reporting on Crime	10
2.3 Literature Gaps	11
Other gaps are:	11
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	12
3.1 Introduction:	12
3.2 Research Design:.....	12
3.3 Population of the Study:.....	13
3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Method:	14
3.5 Materials and Tools for Data Collection:	14
3.6 Data Collection Procedures:	15
3.7 Data Analysis Techniques:	15
3.8 Validity and Reliability:.....	16
3.9 Ethical Considerations:	16
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA	17

4.1Introduction:	17
The chapter is organized around the aims of the study:.....	17
4.1.1 Distribution of choice and presence of the offender type:	18
4.1.2 Portrayal of Victims, Offenders, and Law Enforcement Agencies	19
4.1.3 Framing, Tone, Sensationalism, and Ethical Practices.....	20
4.2 Statistical Analysis of Findings:	21
4.2.1 Qualitative Findings: Thematic Analysis:	21
4.2.1.1 Sensationalism and Dramatic Storytelling:	21
4.2.1.2 Victim Blaming and Stigmatization:	21
4.2.1.3 Institutional Critique and Police Portrayals	21
4.2.1.4 Political and Systemic Contextualization:	21
4.2.1.5 Emerging and Non-Traditional Crimes:	22
4.3 Interpretation and Discussion:	22
4.4 Summary:	22
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	23
5.1 Introduction:	23
5.2 Discussion of Findings:	23
5.2.1 Crime Type Selection and Prominence Patterns of Crime: Predicting Trends in Crime Type Selection and Popularity:	23
5.2.2 Representation of Victims, Sentence and Police	24
5.2.3 Platform Variation and Ethical Considerations:	24
5.3 Conclusions:	25
5.4 Recommendations:	25
5.4.1 What to recommend and improve for Media practitioners and media Houses..	25
5.4.2 Recommendations for Regulatory Bodies and Professional Associations	25
5.4.3 Policy Makers and Law Enforcement Agencies Are Advising	26
5.4.4 Suggestions for Civil Society, NGOs and Academia	26
5.5 Limitations of the Study:	26
5.6 Recommendations for Future Research:	26
REFERENCES.....	27

ABSTRACT

This report has a lot to do with crime reporting, which is a major means for people to know how safe and good crime police and crime are. Crime-related information is primarily transmitted through broadcast and online media in Uganda, while very little empirical work has explored how crime is reported in the media. The study uses content analysis to explore crime reporting in the Ugandan broadcast and online media. The study investigates crime news stories from: NTV Uganda, NBS Television, Bukedde TV, Radio Simba, Daily Monitor Online, Nile Post, and Chimp Reports covering six months. The report examines the type of crimes reported, framing and overall tone in crime stories, how victims, offenders, and law enforcement are included, and how much they are ethically and professionally acceptable as journalistic accounts. By employing thematic and frequency analysis techniques, the study identifies patterns between broadcast and online crime reporting, differences that are evident in their patterns. The results are anticipated to support research on media framing, agenda-setting, and social responsibility and give practical implications for journalists, media practitioners, and policymakers in promoting ethical reporting of crime within Uganda's borders.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction:

In journalism, crime reporting is one of the bases on which we base our national safety and morale, authority, law and order, and justice that people are to associate with us. Crime-related news outlets also feature prominently on broadcast and online media in Uganda as they continue to shape how the citizens of Uganda perceive law enforcement, judicial processes and social order by focusing on crime-related stories. As penetration rates of the internet have increased towards 40 percent by the end of 2025 (Uganda Communications Commission [UCC], 2025), media consumption is more and more turning toward digital space, hence the speed, tone, and framing of crime news. This evolution has increased longstanding worries about sensationalism, ethical reporting, victim and suspect representation, and the general impact of crime journalism on society. Uganda Police Force statistics reveal that in 2023, the figures show a 4.1 percent decrease in reported crimes from 228,074 crimes to 218,715 (Uganda Police Force [UPF], 2025). Media coverage on both violent and dramatic crime however appears to continue to escalate and reflect that population of crime even as crime rates go down. This study performs a systematic content analysis of crime reporting on selected Ugandan broadcast and online media to investigate forms of selection, framing and ethical practice.

1.2 Background to the Study:

1.2.1 Historical Perspective:

Uganda's reporting on crime has evolved alongside its political and media history. Crime media during the colonial period and in the years immediately after independence were heavily influenced by state-owned media companies such as Radio Uganda and Uganda Television. Reporting in this period was heavily reliant on official sources and presented crime in ways that bolstered state authority, law and order while avoiding critical evaluations of security agencies (Nyakaana, 2013). Another paradigm shift came with the

liberalization of the media sector in the early 1990s. New private radio and television stations also upped crime coverage at both the volume and variety of reporting. Yet, growing audience competition has also stimulated more and more interest crime sensationalism, especially violent crime (Nyakaana, 2013). The subsequent rise of online news sites changed this dynamic, placing a premium on immediacy, regular update and audience interaction, often with an end result that involved less verification and context.

1.2.2 Conceptual Perspective:

Crime reporting (a.k.a coverage of crime) is defined as the act of reporting which is defined, interpreted or contextualized within a given legal and social framework as criminal. Decisions about how stories are selected, language used, sources, visuals used, and narrative structure in crime journalism affect how the audience perceives crime and justice. In Uganda, the newsworthiness criteria typically prioritize violent and urban crimes such as robbery, assault and homicide where theft accounts for the largest share of reported crimes nationally at 28 percent in 2024 (UPF, 2025). Crime reporting remains episodic with emphasis on isolated incidents, and episodic reportage, even though thematic reportage linking crime to social problems, such as poverty, unemployment or governance, is scarce (Surette, 2015). Emotive speech techniques and sensationalist media narratives, especially in online, continue the distortion of reality promoting both stereotype and moral panic (Jewkes, 2011).

1.2.3 Theoretical Perspective:

An agenda-setting and framing theoretical perspective on social responsibility theory is carried out in the present study. Agenda-setting theory describes how media coverage of crime impacts the way people view importance of issues, which often promotes the perception of a crime crisis despite deteriorating official data (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; UPF, 2025). That idea of framing frames the way stories about crime are told, what is being framed, and how that framing leads to reading interpretations or the need to blame people. The episodic frames used in crime reporting focus on individual blame while ignoring systemic or institutional issues (Goffman, 1974). Social responsibility theory has been argued to offer an ethical standard emphasizing

that when reporting sensitive issues like crime and violence are involved in the field of journalism, to uphold journalistic ethics and to consider the respect for human dignity and accuracy in journalism in its ethical standards including balance, transparency, impartiality, integrity, justice, and fairness in relation to the principles as well as reportage on the subjects of issues such as this crime and violence (Siebert et al., 1956).

1.2.4 Contextual Perspective:

Uganda's media modern-day environment has seen explosive growth, regulatory supervision, and continual political and economic pressure. Uganda had over 300 licensed radio stations, several television channels, and an increasing number of online news platforms by 2025 (UCC, 2025). Journalists work within the constraints of regulation, commercial motives, and occasional instances of harassment and intimidation (Human Rights Watch, 2025). Institutional relationships with the Uganda Police Force and courts further shape crime reporting. Although crime statistics suggest that urban areas like Kampala report a significant proportion of reported crime (UPF, 2025), media coverage tends to focus on high-impact, exaggerated or sensationalized incidents, ultimately downplaying wider trends in crime and prevention.

1.3 Statement of the Problem:

Crime journalism in Uganda is one of the central aspects of the public awareness discourse, yet very little systematic comparative research has been done to explore how crime is selected, framed and reported among the Ugandan public through both the broadcast and online platforms. Frequent issues include sensationalism, overemphasis on violent crime, victimisation and stigmatization as well as an uneven depiction of police authorities. A disparity between falling crime statistics and increased media coverage of violent crimes represents a potential threat to public misunderstanding, exacerbation of fear and an erosion of confidence in institutions. This paper attempts to fill this gap by investigating this gap through a systematic content analysis of crime reporting in some Ugandan media.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to observe how Ugandan broadcast and online media chooses, frames, and ethically practices crime.

Part 1: Objectives/Purpose

General Objective

To research Ugandan broadcast and online media crime reporting practice.

Some Particular Goals:

So as to identify the top types of reported crimes in Ugandan broadcast and online media. To help explore depictions of victims, offenders, and law enforcement officers in crime reports. To also check out the difference in coverage of crime patterns and framing of media reporting between broadcast and online.

1.5 Research Questions:

What kind of crimes are most common news crimes reported in Ugandan broadcast and online media?

How are victims, offenders and law enforcement represented in criminal reports? Which of these patterns of reporting and framing of crime differ in the broadcast channel compared to the online media sites?

1.6 Scope of the Study:

The research samples several national broadcast and online media in Uganda. It analyses the crime-related news articles or news that was issued or broadcast from January to December 2025 under focus on framing, portrayal,

tone and ethics. Audience reception work and user-generated media have not been considered.

1.7 Significance of the Study:

The study adds to the scholarly literature on media and crime in the Ugandan and more generally African setting. Its results could help guide journalism training, media regulation and policymaking for entities like the Uganda Communications Commission and media advocacy groups. In support of media literacy, the study also promotes responsible and ethical reporting on crime.

1.8 Conceptual Framework:

The research posits that media platform, editorial culture, and regulatory context shape crime reporting. This influences the framing, tone, and representation of the crime — all of which in turn help shape public perceptions of crime, victims, offenders, and law enforcement agencies.

1.9 Definition of Key Terms:

Crime reporting: Coverage of events classified as criminal under Ugandan law - reporting on the selection, framing, and interpretation of the occurrence - Journalism

Broadcast media: Radio and television platforms used to spread news content to mass audiences.

Online media: Digital news sites that distribute news materials via the internet.

Framing: The process of emphasizing certain aspects of a news story to shape audience interpretation.

Sensationalism: The use of exaggerated or emotionally charged language, visuals, or narratives to attract audience attention.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction:

In this chapter, academic (and professional) literature reviewing crime reporting in broadcast and online media focusing on Uganda is synthesised. It relies on international, Africa-specific and Uganda-specific studies from 2010-2026. Recent institutional sources such as the Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Report 2024 (published in 2025) and the African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME) are included for the sake of context and period perspective. The literature is structured thematically to discuss: the media's role in constructing crime narratives, salient theoretical considerations, including agenda-setting and framing; victim/offender/law enforcement representation; ethical and professional practice and issues, contrasting broadcast and online crime reports; and research limitation in relation to current research. By situating the discussion within the frame of Uganda's emerging media context with heightened connectivity and digital- vs. traditional content competition; we use this chapter to justify the comparative content analysis of crime reporting in Uganda. 2.2 Crime Reporting and the Media:

Crime reporting is a staple in journalism, and is important for the construction of notions of crime in the public mind. Rather than being simply a mirror to reality, media construct crime narratives in terms of selective emphasis, wording and sources. Ongoing attention at the global level to crimes that fit into news values, such as violence, novelty, urgency, etc., results in sensationalism at most, while structural crimes (e.g., economic and corruption) receive relatively limited attention. In Uganda, such a pattern is

reflected in broad coverage of violent urban crime, including robbery and homicide, in spite of theft's role in making up a larger percentage of reported crimes. For instance, while theft made up a substantial proportion of crimes in 2024, media coverage was predominantly devoted to violent crimes and high-profile economic crimes. Similarly, Ugandan media often link youth crime with poverty and unemployment and hence promote simplistic causal explanations. Ugandan media liberalization – a move to increase the number of outlets, especially radio stations – has contributed more diversity in media coverage. But commercialization has also turned audiences into more competitive competition and promoted sensationalism. The involvement of the media in criminal cases, even when covering suspects and cases is on the agenda, blurs the line between journalism and the police. Although these types of practices can advance investigations, they raise issues related to due process and the safety of journalists, particularly in urban settings like Kampala, where crime reporting is the most concentrated.

2.3 Media Influences, Agenda-Setting, and Public Opinions on Crime:

According to agenda-setting theory, the media helps to control public priorities by deciding what issues the focus remains on. This kind of heavy crime coverage can promote public anxiety and help to suggest there is more insecurity even as official statistics suggest either stability or decrease. In Uganda, fear of growing crime persists, although crime incidents decreased nationally in 2024. While the radio still molds the crime agenda in rural areas, news media have a strong bias towards certain crime stories while social media outlets exacerbate crime narratives with their algorithms that prioritize high-emotion content. This has played a part in moral panics on

issues like mob justice and urban violence. Likewise, African studies find sustained exposure to violent crime stories is associated with increased public support for punitive measures. The increased use of social media for policing and journalism has increased the agenda-setting effect. While digital platforms enable quick sharing of information, they also exacerbate the spread of misinformation, especially during politically sensitive times. To protect the public, media-driven crime agendas can erode public trust in institutions such as them and point to the need for responsible reporting that correlates public perception with vetted data. 2.4 Framing of Crime News:

Framing theory describes the way in which media process and present information, influencing how audiences interpret crime. Episodic framing, which highlights individualised incidents and individual culpability, is the prevailing framework in crime reporting, whereas thematic framing, the construction of crime as situated within societal-economic structures, is less prevalent. Online media in Uganda mainly use episodic and emotive frames of reference, especially where sexual and gender-based violence is concerned. Headlines rely heavily on drama and immediacy, which only serves to stigmatize victims and make structural causes (like poverty and inequality) harder to see. Whereas broadcast media is the default voice for official police narratives, positively depicting the successes of law enforcement and with more critical commentary on failures when it goes to the institutional level. Recent research shows youth crime is commonly framed as proof of new 'gang' cultures without considering unemployment and urban marginalization. Such framing entrenches stereotypes and oversimplifies social realities, in particular in digital spaces where speed and engagement

trump depth and context. 2.5 Victims, Offenders & Law Enforcement Representation. Crime actors are seen in the media by social categories (gender, class, and ethnicity) defined. Sexual violence victims in Uganda, in particular, are often seen as suspects or in some instances indirectly to blame, defying ethical standards and contributing to stigma. While offenders who commit crimes from marginalized communities are stereotyped into the mainstream society as inherently deviant, offenders of white-collar and elite crimes appear more lenient and well-intentioned. Law enforcement is often portrayed on the one hand between heroic and negative side of portraying it alternates between heroic and critical images. Even police are sometimes presented as protectors and trouble-makers, while other situations have also been the subject of media portrayals of police as attackers, stories of illegal law enforcement behavior and violations of human rights have portrayed them as aggressors. These alternate accounts shape public trust in police, sympathize with both victims and offenders of crime and certain kinds of criminal justice policy. The literature emphasizes the need for balanced sourcing and other inclusive narratives to resist established biases. 2.6 Ethics, Professionalism and Social Responsibility in Crime Reporting Social responsibility theory urges the media to report accurately, fairly and with consideration for potential harm. Legal and ethical issues in crime reporting in Uganda involve: commercial considerations / pressure, lack of pay, political boundaries and the rapid development of online journalism. Research found that widespread ethical abuses took place, with the publication of unconfirmed facts, sensational headlines, or invasions of

privacy. These troubles are exacerbated in the age of digital platforms which have incentivized speed and virality over accuracy. Ethical reporting is further hampered by political regulations and security laws, which further limit the ability of reports to cover state actions pertaining to crime in the critical realm of governance, and limit the news to journalism that does not contribute to the state. Solutions to these issues have included newsroom verification, professional development, professional training and calls for journalism that is solution-oriented. But, however, fragmented enforcement of regulations and lack of resources are undermining professionalism. Strengthening ethical compliance is also in the forefront of improving the quality and credibility of crime reporting across Uganda.

2.2 Broadcast vs. Online Reporting on Crime

Broadcast and Online Crime Reporting: A Comparison. For example, broadcast media which are often limited by editorial oversight, regulatory frameworks, and time constraints may promote more balanced reporting. Online, though, values immediacy and audience engagement: sensationalistic language, sensational visuals. In Uganda, the more common context is provided by television and radio outlets, whereas clickbait strategies are found in online outlets. As the regulation of social media itself has changed, digital space has now developed into a focal point of crime discourse, which has enhanced the spread of information (and misinformation). While online platforms can facilitate investigations and raise public awareness, they also serve as a platform for mob justice narratives and unverified reporting. The concurrent

use of both online and broadcast media as ‘broadcast’ or ‘online news’ has produced a hybrid crime-reporting landscape, where each channel offers specific ethical and professional challenges.

2.3 Literature Gaps

Despite extensive global scholarship upon media and crime, relatively little empirical research has been conducted specifically around Uganda. Very few studies provide systematic comparative analysis of broadcast and online crime reporting, especially with changes in technology, such as artificial intelligence, digital sensationalism, and police-media relations.

Other gaps are:

- Limited attention to rural crime representation
- Insufficient measures of ethical compliance
- African-centered research tends to be generalized across different political and media contexts. This study aims to fill these gaps, providing a contemporary, comparative analysis of crime reporting practices in Uganda.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction:

This chapter describes the research methodology taken to investigate crime reporting in Ugandan broadcast and online media. In this context, the research design, population and sample, sampling methods, data collection instruments and procedures, data analysis methods, validity and reliability mechanisms, and ethics considerations are described. The methodology is tailored to the context of Ugandan media such as limited access to archival material, political concern regarding crime reporting and uneven technological infrastructure. Mixed-methods content analysis will be used to analyse media content in a systematic and replicable ways. Its design integrates measurement of manifest content by quantified data and interpretation by qualitative interpretation of the framing, narrative structure of stories, as a means of understanding how crime reporting has changed in an emerging and complex digital and regulatory environment like Uganda.

3.2 Research Design:

It has been conducted through a qualitative mixed-methods data analysis design and using a non-experimental descriptive design. The methods chosen in this work apply to media studies and its ability to systematize attention to textual, visual and audio mediums in such a way to obtain patterns, trends and meanings of communication. Thematic - qualitative the qualitative focus of this study is thematic research on how crime is framed: narrative patterns, patterns of sourcing, use of episodic and thematic frames. In quantitative

terms, the design includes frequencies and statistics to determine which nature of crimes, tone, and actors are prioritized in broadcast as opposed to online platforms. This approach eliminates the limitation of focusing too much on a single technique and enables the study to be both deep and comparable whilst examining Ugandan crime reporting. The architecture suits archival media content, sidesteps the ethical implications from direct human involvement, but is sensitive to government provisions for media availability and publishing in Uganda.

3.3 Population of the Study:

The study population is all crime-related news content produced by certain national broadcast and online media outlets registered in Uganda from January to December 2025. Crime report content is comprised of news reports, bulletins, features and segments related with crime incidents, investigation, arrests, court cases and law enforcement activities. The broadcast media from the population include all the national television and radio stations, which the audience can reach through a wide presence, including NTV Uganda, NBS Television, Bukedde TV and Radio Simba. Digital media are established digital news delivery platforms such as Daily Monitor Online, The Nile Post and Chimp Reports. The population is limited only to professionally produced journalistic output, with no user-generated content from social media posts in order to concentrate on the practice of institutional news production. The people above exemplify Uganda media system structure, where crime reporting has dominated news agendas especially in the context of urban-oriented content.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Method:

A purposive sampling technique was employed with a total sample size of 120 crime-related news items. There are 60 broadcast items of the sample and 60 articles published online for the comparative purposes. The size of the broadcast sample consists of 30 television and 30 radio items and the online sample comprises representative distribution of selected digital media outlets. Purposive sampling is suitable for content analysis because it allows the purposeful choosing of items rich in information for consideration relevant to the study objectives. The sample size is small enough to achieve qualitative saturation and allow meaningful quantitative comparison. Stratification across key crime categories (for example violent crime, property crime, sexual offences and economic crime) informs the sampling further. Ensuring the sample is aligned with the official crime patterns documented in Uganda and can therefore inform high-impact news narratives from which the public will derive perceptions, so that the data has some relevance in Uganda.

3.5 Materials and Tools for Data Collection:

The data are obtained through a structured coding sheet formulated for this study. The coding tool captures variables associated with the research questions and concerns, specifically crime types, prominence and framing/tone of stories, the presence of appropriate sources, the number of victims, offenders and police presented, and conformance with the associated ethical standards of anonymity and balance. The coding sheet draws from established content analysis methodologies and was adapted to the Ugandan setting. Other independent variables are incorporated from local perspectives like mob justice narratives and police sources, as well as the use

of emotional language. Audio-visual content for broadcast content goes through transcription to enable both verbal and visual elements to be systematically encoded, and online articles get archived to maintain layout and headline structure.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures:

The second part of the interview focuses on data collection, with the goal of establishing the eligible crime-related content to collect through systematic search of mass media website, archive, and broadcast audio data of the study period. The search terms based on crime and law enforcement can reach relevant items. Each item chosen for selection is coded independently by trained coders with reference to the uniform coding sheet. In order to maintain uniformity, monthly review meetings are held to review coding decisions and to make sense of ambiguities. A pilot coding practice is conducted before the main data collection so as to prepare the instrument and procedures as possible. Data collection is done over a select interval of time, with secure storage and backup facilities in place to avoid loss of data.

3.7 Data Analysis Techniques:

Applying thematic analysis to analyse qualitative data reveals pervasive frames, narratives and representations of crime reporting. This cycle consists of several cycles of familiarisation, coding, theme analysis, review, and interpretation. The quantitative data can be analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage to compare crime coverage in radio and online media. Cross-tabulation of the relationships between variables such as crime type, framing, and tone, for example, are

performed. Triangulation between qualitative and quantitative findings provides the possibility of obtaining a more comprehensive and accurate read across the sample.

3.8 Validity and Reliability:

Precise alignments between research objectives, coding categories and analytical procedures enhance the validity of the study. Expert review of the coding device and pilot testing help improve validity of the content validity. The research also preserves ecological validity through its analysis of real-world media content generation and consumption by audiences as performed, produced and consumed in the real world by the audience. Reliability is ensured through its use of coder training, copying codebook and intercoder reliability testing. Ongoing assessments, reviews, and documentation of all methodological choices allow for replication and consolidation of coding through repeated reviews, ultimately ensuring consistent use of this same methodology in similar studies of media.

3.9 Ethical Considerations:

Because no human participants were included in the study, all multimedia-media content used in the study is publicly available. But research is guided by ethical principles. Crime reports are investigated responsibly and without sharing harmful information, particularly those that might further stigmatize victims or other vulnerable groups. All references are cited accurately and the results are represented as academically honest and constructive in media practice. The study takes into consideration the political sensitivity of crime reporting in Uganda too and uses reflexivity to minimise researcher bias.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction:

In this chapter findings are presented, analyzed, and interpreted, based on content analysis of 120 crime reports that were issued by selected Ugandan broadcast and online media between January and December 2025. Based on these studies, the sampled broadcast outlets include NTV Uganda, NBS Television, Bukedde TV, and Radio Simba, while the online platforms are Daily Monitor Online, The Nile Post, and ChimpReports.

The chapter is organized around the aims of the study:

(i) identifying prevalent practices in the choice and coverage of crime categories

(ii) analyzing the characterizations of offenders, victims and law enforcement agencies and

(iii) comparing the framing, tone, sensationalism and ethical guidelines of broadcast and online media used. A mixture of methods was utilized, incorporating quantitative analyses using SPSS and qualitative thematic analyses using NVivo. This combination allows for statistical comparisons and contextual interpretation of crime reporting behaviours in the context of Uganda's changing media environment. The results are considered within a comprehensive perspective of national crime trends, in terms of falling on the whole level reported crime and rises on selected groups robbery and economic crimes have risen. To clear up clarity, quantitative findings are reported in terms of tables while qualitative findings are described by way of example on 2025 media reports.

Quantitative findings presentation: This chapter reports descriptive and comparative quantitative results of the coded part of the sample. For ease of reference, all degrees are rounded to two decimal places.

4.1.1 Distribution of choice and presence of the offender type:

Throughout the sample, the most reported type as theft was 29.17% of the total, followed by assault (18.33%) and homicide (17.50%). The distributions follow a pattern quite closely that is presented in reports of crime in the media (stealing the most crimes being the most often reported crime), although these patterns are consistent with the media's strong bias towards violent and at-large social offending that reflects some of the conventional norms of news reporting. Economic crimes accounted for 16.67% of reports, showing growing media coverage of corruption and financial crimes. Sexual violence and other offences, such as illicit wildlife trafficking and cross-border crimes, accounted for 9.17% of coverage each. These categories are smaller fractions and are less prevalent (although their existence indicates growing interest in non-obvious crime narratives).

Table 4.1: Overall Frequencies of Crime Types (N = 120)

Crime Type	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Theft	35	29.17
Assault	22	18.33
Homicide	21	17.50
Economic crime	20	16.67
Sexual violence	11	9.17
Other crimes	11	9.17

Platform-based comparison shows that broadcast media placed greater emphasis on theft and assault, often through episodic urban reports, while

online platforms devoted more coverage to economic crimes and sexual violence. Nearly half of all reports (48%) were accorded high prominence through headline placement or lead positioning, particularly for politically sensitive or high-profile cases.

Table 4.2: Crime Types by Media Platform (N = 120)

Platform	Theft (%)	Assault (%)	Homicide (%)	Economic crime (%)	Sexual violence (%)	Other (%)
Broadcast (n = 60)	30.00	23.33	18.33	10.00	6.67	10.00
Online (n = 60)	28.33	13.33	16.67	23.33	11.67	8.33

4.1.2 Portrayal of Victims, Offenders, and Law Enforcement Agencies

Victims were portrayed sympathetically in 44.17% of reports, neutrally in 30.00%, and in a blaming manner in 25.83%. Victim blaming was most prevalent in reports on sexual violence and trafficking. Online media displayed a dual tendency of both higher sympathetic framing and higher levels of blame, suggesting a reliance on emotionally charged narratives.

Table 4.3: Victim Portrayal by Platform (N = 120)

Platform	Sympathetic (%)	Neutral (%)	Blamed (%)
Broadcast	38.33	38.33	23.33
Online	50.00	21.67	28.33

Offenders were most commonly portrayed as deviant or dangerous (40.83%), reinforcing moral panic narratives, while 21.67% of reports adopted a humanising frame. Law enforcement agencies were depicted as ineffective in

42.50% of reports, heroic in 26.67%, and neutral in 30.83%. Online media were more critical of police performance than broadcast outlets.

Table 4.4: Offender Portrayal by Platform (N = 120)

Platform	Deviant (%)	Humanised (%)	Neutral (%)
Broadcast	40.00	21.67	38.33
Online	41.67	21.67	36.67

Table 4.5: Law Enforcement Portrayal by Platform (N = 120)

Platform	Heroic (%)	Ineffective (%)	Neutral (%)
Broadcast	21.67	38.33	40.00
Online	31.67	46.67	21.67

4.1.3 Framing, Tone, Sensationalism, and Ethical Practices

Episodic framing dominated the sample (76.67%), particularly within online media, where 90% of reports focused on isolated events rather than broader structural explanations. Sensational tone was identified in 60.83% of all reports and was substantially higher in online media (80.00%) than broadcast outlets (41.67%).

Ethical breaches were observed in 45% of reports, including victim identification, lack of balance, reliance on unverified sources, and sensational language. Online platforms consistently recorded higher rates of ethical violations.

4.2 Statistical Analysis of Findings:

Chi-square analysis revealed statistically significant differences between broadcast and online media in framing, sensationalism, and ethical compliance. No significant differences were found in crime type selection or portrayals of victims, offenders, and law enforcement agencies. These results indicate that while representational patterns are broadly consistent across platforms, online media exhibit more pronounced stylistic and ethical deviations.

4.2.1 Qualitative Findings: Thematic Analysis:

Five dominant themes emerged from the qualitative analysis.

4.2.1.1 Sensationalism and Dramatic Storytelling:

Online reports frequently employed emotive headlines and graphic descriptions to attract attention. Broadcast outlets generally adopted a more restrained tone but occasionally incorporated dramatic visuals and reenactments.

4.2.1.2 Victim Blaming and Stigmatization:

Victim blaming was particularly evident in coverage of sexual violence and trafficking. Language implying victim negligence or poor decision-making reinforced stigma and discouraged reporting of such crimes.

4.2.1.3 Institutional Critique and Police Portrayals

Law enforcement agencies were often framed as ineffective or compromised, especially in politically sensitive cases. Conversely, wildlife crime reporting occasionally portrayed police and conservation agencies as successful and proactive.

4.2.1.4 Political and Systemic Contextualization:

A minority of reports adopted thematic framing by linking crime to broader political and institutional contexts, including corruption scandals and international criminal justice processes. Such framing was more common in broadcast media.

4.2.1.5 Emerging and Non-Traditional Crimes:

Coverage of wildlife trafficking and environmental crimes formed a distinct theme, reflecting growing recognition of organized and transnational criminal networks.

4.3 Interpretation and Discussion:

The findings demonstrate that Ugandan media play a central role in constructing public perceptions of crime. Consistent with agenda-setting theory, the prominence of theft and violent crime elevates these offences as public priorities, even amid overall crime decline. Framing theory explains the dominance of episodic narratives that attribute crime to individual deviance rather than structural factors, while social responsibility theory highlights the ethical shortcomings observed, particularly in online reporting.

Platform differences underscore the influence of digital competition and algorithmic visibility on journalistic practices. The prevalence of sensationalism and ethical violations in online media raises concerns about public fear, victim protection, and trust in institutions.

4.4 Summary:

This chapter has presented and interpreted quantitative and qualitative findings on crime reporting in Ugandan broadcast and online media. The results reveal persistent overemphasis on violent crime, widespread episodic framing, and notable ethical lapses, particularly in online platforms. These findings provide a foundation for the conclusions and recommendations presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction:

The findings of the study will be summarized and the findings will be made to support key stakeholders in the analysis. It draws on the quantitative and qualitative research results of 120 crime reports published from January to December 2025 across specific Ugandan broadcast and online media. The discussion reiterates the study's purposes; to explore crime choice and visibility, the depiction of victims, perpetrators and justice and a framing, tone and ethical critique of media practices. Against that portrait, the chapter positions these points within Uganda's 2025 socio-political context, which is known to be marked by pre-election tensions, ongoing security reforms, a continuing decline in reported crime overall despite attention from the media surrounding a handful of incidents. Findings are interpreted through relevant theoretical perspectives including agenda-setting, framing, and social responsibility theories.

5.2 Discussion of Findings:

This part discusses how the findings are situated with the research aims, theoretical framework, as well as existing literature with a focus on Uganda's media, political, and socio-economic context.

5.2.1 Crime Type Selection and Prominence Patterns of Crime: Predicting Trends in Crime Type Selection and Popularity:

The analysis identifies that coverage of theft, assault, and homicide were most important as they provided more media coverage than others, indicating not only that crime statistics from official statistics, but that the media tends to favour violent and interpersonal crimes more and more. This emphasis supports agenda-setting effects that suggest that with repeated reporting, certain types of crimes get prioritised as top public issues, leading to perceptions of insecurity, despite fewer crimes reported overall. Economic and other systemic crimes received less (though not nearly as many) media coverage for their increasingly important existence; however, the official numbers were that they do matter more. Broadcast media has an eye to a visually striking localized coverage of such a scenario, whereas on an online

platform, the narratives will likely gravitate towards more corruption and scandal-type topics a trend that is certainly a reflection of algorithmic impact on visibility and audience engagement statistics. This imbalance results in public misunderstanding of structural and rural crime phenomena and perpetuates an urban-dominated crime narrative.

5.2.2 Representation of Victims, Sentence and Police

Research suggested the media's portrayal strengthens stereotypes and oversimplified narratives. Victims were often positioned sympathetically, yet many reports, particularly of sexual violence and trafficking, engaged in victim blaming. This framing makes the blame individualised and downplays structural vulnerabilities - poverty, gender discrimination. Offenders were mostly represented as deviant with not much humanisation and were reinforced through moral panic narratives centred on youth and vulnerable groups. The reports tended to focus on law enforcement (as ineffective, compromised agencies) especially for politically sensitive cases and there was the positive portrayal of wildlife crime investigations. Frame-based representations of these issues fit well within framing theory, demonstrating media influence on trust in institutions.

5.2.3 Platform Variation and Ethical Considerations:

TV vs. internet there were some clear distinctions. On online platforms, episodic framing, sensationalism and ethical violations were more prevalent, through emotive language and unverified sources, and the violation of victims' privacy. Broadcast media featured a relatively greater balance as these operations in turn were influenced by editorial oversight and regulatory constraints. These findings demonstrate challenges to social responsibility in Uganda's growing digital media environment. Business imperatives, low pay, political influence and race to be seen online encourage unethical behavior, including potential misinformation, public fear and anti-legitimate institutions based on fear and distrust of their officials.

5.3 Conclusions:

From the above, the following findings emerged from the review:

Selective emphasis upon crimes: Ugandan media disproportionately reflect violent and theft-related types of crime, the result of agenda setting effects, the extent of which skewed the public's perception of trends towards crime. Framing and Representation: Majorly episodic frames and stereotypical depictions of victims, offenders and the police personalise crimes and detract from understanding more general structures. Platform Specific Challenges: There are greater levels of sensationalism and transgression of ethics demonstrated by online media versus broadcast to be worse when it comes to professionalism and trust in the media. In general, even if Uganda's media still served as a watchdog, by 2025 official crime reporting style exacerbated the prevalence of the over-simplified fear, ethical dilemmas and overall lack of public knowledge on crime in the media in this country.

5.4 Recommendations:

Based on the results, the research suggestions are made as follows.

5.4.1 What to recommend and improve for Media practitioners and media Houses

Enhance continual professional training on ethical crime reporting, the framing of crime and victim-sensitive journalism. Implement tighter monitoring and editorial review processes, particularly for online outlets. Broaden coverage of crime across coverage to underreported rural, economic, and environmental crimes.

5.4.2 Recommendations for Regulatory Bodies and Professional Associations

Reinforce online media regulation and ethical standards. Support journalists' rights and pay, and their educational initiatives to build capacity. Support nationwide media literacy programs to help readers critically evaluate current crime.

5.4.3 Policy Makers and Law Enforcement Agencies Are Advising

Enhance transparency and allow real time access to crime data to back accurate reporting. Reform laws that limit investigative journalism to limit self-censorship. Work with media organizations on public education campaigns addressing evolving crimes.

5.4.4 Suggestions for Civil Society, NGOs and Academia

Follow up and promote ethical media practices through independent evaluations. Assist research efforts of the public on media effects, perception of crime, attitudes about crime and public policy. Support community projects that represent an array of views of people around crime reporting.

5.5 Limitations of the Study:

Many limitations arise from this study. The sample size, adequate for content analysis, does not adequately reflect the breadth of Uganda's media landscape. But by omitting the rural and vernacular community, national outlets may be overrepresented. The 2025 window, affected by pre-election dynamics, may also restrain generalisability. Also, audiences were not considered in the study and qualitative interpretation could be affected by the coder's subjectivity while its reliability can be considered.

5.6 Recommendations for Future Research:

Future studies might broaden this research with audience perception studies, longitudinal analysis across election cycles, user-generated and social media content, and focus on more rural or vernacular outlets. Interdisciplinary research on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and crime reporting should also add to the knowledge of media-crime interactions in Uganda.

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